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PROGRAM All Things Considered

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SUBJECT Daniel Schorr Comments on Director Casey's Position

ALEX CHADWICK: News analyst Daniel Schorr says CIA Director William Casey may no longer feel secure in his job, and explains why.

DANIEL SCHORR: CIA Director William Casey, President Reagan's 1980 campaign manager and longtime friend, may be in more trouble at the White House than Chief of Staff Donald Reagan. That's because of a growing perception that Casey protected himself at the President's expense by insisting on a written order directing him not to tell Congress of Iranian arms shipments, as required by the Intelligence Oversight Act. The order was initiated and drafted by Casey's general counsel, Stanley Sporkin. Sporkin has a long record as a troubleshooter for Casey dating back to the early '70s, when he served as enforcement chief of the Securities and Exchange Commission under Casey as Chairman.

In 1971 a lawyer for Robert Vesco, the fugitive international financier, visited Casey and asked him to postpone an investigation of Vesco in return for a big contribution to the Nixon campaign. Sporkin warned Casey then that he was headed for deep trouble. The investigation of Vesco proceeded and Casey ended up as a government witness in the bribery trial of John Mitchell and Maurice Stans, who had arranged the appointment with Casey. Both of them were acquitted.

At the end of 1985, Sporkin, as CIA general counsel, took action to protect his boss again. He drafted a presidential finding directing Casey not to inform Congress of the Iranian arms deal, based on Sporkin's reading of the preamble to this statute as permitting such exceptions from the notification requirement.

Curiously, Sporkin, after a long battle, had been confirmed as a federal district court judge a month before President Reagan signed the January 17th directive. Judge Sporkin told me today that he had delayed taking his judicial oath until February because he felt a moral obligation to continue serving Casey until a new general counsel was named.

Casey was undoubtedly grateful for Sporkin's help in negotiating an order that, in effect, transferred from him to the President the responsibility for not informing Congress about the shipment of arms to Iran. But in retrospect, this has produced another kind of trouble for Casey. Hell hath no fury like a Congress scorned. And the President's order to shut out Congress is becoming the focus of a growing conflict with Capitol Hill. And it is dawning on some in the White House that Casey, in protecting himself, may have exposed the President.

For Casey, who has survived many storms, this may be one of the worst.